Justice
May 8, 2008

The following statement was issued by the Honourable Jerome Kennedy, Minister of Justice and Attorney General. It was also read in the House of Assembly:

Improved Access to Justice for Women and Children a Priority

I am pleased to rise today to speak about a number of initiatives in Budget 2008 that the Department of Justice is undertaking which will provide better access to justice, particularly for women and children, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Budget 2008 has also allocated $279,000 to fund a Family Violence Court pilot project in St. John's. Family Violence Courts are specialized courts that help break the cycle of violence and have worked across the country to help lower the burden on the legal system. Most importantly, these courts work with victims and offenders to find solutions best suited for all involved with an end goal of breaking the cycle of violence. It is our responsibility to ensure that justice is carried out, victims are treated fairly and offenders do not appear before our courts again. The Family Violence Court initiative will lead the way in helping families who have unfortunately been impacted by violence find the road to recovery.

As well, the Department of Justice will provide $254,900 to staff the Legal Aid Child Protection Section in Corner Brook with a lawyer, a paralegal, as well as a full time social worker. This team will provide representation for parents when authorities have intervened in the lives of their families. Intervention, in many cases, involves an application to court and parents have a right to seek both legal advice and representation. Legal Aid has always provided lawyers for these cases, however, this initiative will enable Legal Aid staff to work very closely with Child, Youth and Family Services and will be of great benefit to parents and families who approach Legal Aid for assistance during times of crisis.

Further, an additional $200,000 has been committed to establish a Legal Aid office in Labrador West, a matter of concern raised by women's groups in that region. This office will support the re-establishment, by our government, of the Provincial Court in Wabush in 2007.

These initiatives demonstrate that our government is committed to providing improved access to an efficient and representative justice system and that we are thinking outside the box to find solutions that work best for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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